



## News from the Office of ERIE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARK POLONCARZ

### NEWS RELEASE

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### **HOAK, BURSTEIN PREPARE FOR FALLS PREVENTION AWARENESS WEEK**

*Education, Outreach to Area Seniors Designed to Increase Quality of Life, Promote Balance*

**ERIE COUNTY, NY—** Today, Erie County Senior Services Commissioner Randy Hoak was joined by Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein to announce that Falls Prevention Week is underway in Erie County. National Fall Prevention Awareness Day takes place on the first day of Fall, which was September 22. Throughout this week, the Department of Senior Services will be promoting ways to improve balance through the “Matter of Balance” program, develop and maintain regular exercise habits through the “Stay Fit-Club 99” program, and will hold a “Slipper Swap” this Friday, September 27 to aid seniors in getting rid of old, unsafe slippers and replacing them with a safer, slip-resistant pair.

“Falls Prevention Awareness Week is a good way to highlight an issue that affects seniors everyday while educating everyone on the ways that falls can be diminished and prevented,” **said Commissioner Hoak.** “There are things that seniors can do to keep themselves safer in their homes, such as checking the maintenance in walkways, stairwells, and other areas where falls may occur. There are programs like ‘Matter of Balance’, which reduce the fear of falling while increasing the activity level of seniors who have concerns about falling. The ‘Club 99’ Fitness program also helps to improve balance, strength, and flexibility, which gives seniors greater confidence and endurance. Also, the Stay Fit Dining Program brings area seniors together for healthy meals and exercise. There are many ways to get involved, be healthier, and prevent falls.”

In 2011, falls among older adults cost the U.S. healthcare system over \$30 billion and were responsible for many seniors losing independence and quality of life. Lack of regular exercise and increased inactivity leads to weakness and instability, increasing the chances of falling. Simple balancing and strength-building exercises can help participants reduce their risk of falling, improve their balance, and maintain good mental health regardless of age.

**Dr. Gale Burstein added,** “The benefits of exercise and good nutrition are well-known and are available to people of all ages, even if they are just beginning. It is never too late to begin eating right and exercising, which will improve your overall health, make you stronger, and increase your independence. I encourage all area seniors to take part in programs like Stay Fit Dining, which promotes nutritious food, exercise, and socialization, as well as Matter of Balance, which can help residents overcome their fear of falling and design ways to decrease the likelihood of falls.”

To draw attention to the issue of unsafe slippers and the safety hazard they present, a “Slipper Swap” will be held on Friday, September 27, 2013 from 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM at the Orchard Park Senior Center, 70 Linwood Avenue, Orchard Park NY. Reservations are required for this event, and participants will be able to exchange their old, worn slippers for a FREE nutritious Stay Fit lunch. In addition, the Health Department will be conducting free blood pressure testing on-site at the event.

“Slippers can be very dangerous when they wear out and are a major cause of falls within the home,” **added Hoak.** “A good pair of slippers should have slip resistant soles, easy fastening straps to allow access and good support when the slipper is on the foot, a heel stiffener for increased support, and a firm insole to increase stability as well.”

“A Matter of Balance” is an award-winning program that can help reduce the fear of falling and increase the activity levels of older adults who have concerns about falling. Classes help participants learn to view falls and fear of falling as controllable; set realistic goals for increased activity; change their environment to reduce fall risk factors; and promote exercise to increase strength and balance. After 6 months in the program, 97% of participants report being more comfortable talking about their fear of falling, 97% feel comfortable increasing their activity levels, and 99% plan to continue exercising.

**For more information on “Matter of Balance” classes, Stay Fit Dining/Club 99, or Fall Prevention, call (716) 858-7639 or visit**

<http://www2.erie.gov/seniorservices/index.php?q=nutrition-amp-dining-stay-fit-dining-program>

**For more information on the Erie County Department of Health, visit**

<http://www2.erie.gov/health/>

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